

# On Connections, Vulnerability, and Gratitude

Asma and Taylor

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In lieu of a typical conclusion, I think I'd really just like to share a profoundly personal moment Asma and I shared, in which she reversed our relationship and asked *me* a few questions. These five minutes contain the seconds in which we realize just how similar our experiences and aspirations are, despite our vastly different lives. They put me in a place equally as vulnerable as Asma herself had been with me for all those other hours. And they capture just a glimpse of the gratitude I feel for this experience.

*A: Do you think I—your, um, experiencing anything on my, my story, your own, your own yourself, not the other people, like what experiences you have?*

*T: [inhales] Are there parts of your experience that you think I have also experienced? Is that what you're asking?*

*A: Yes.*

*T: Um. Hm. [pause] I have also been told that I'm a fighter. I was born...very, very early. I was born two and a half months early.*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: Was born at 29 weeks.*

*A: You tell me, I remember.*

*T: Yeah. So I have had to fight to be alive since I—before I was supposed to be alive, right?*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: And then...I... [pause] When I was five or six years old, um, I developed anxiety. Like a very serious anxiety, um. And so...most of my life has been...me sort of convincing myself that I can, I can do everything that everyone else can do. Um, and...Not to be ashamed of, of my fear of the world.*

*A: Beautiful, yeah.*

*T: Um, and of who I am. Um. So I'm fighting, and—not in the same way as you?*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: I think, it's more, much more internal fight, it's inside my brain—*

*A: It's almost same because you're healthy, you, you're almost supposed to be [mumbles]...*

*T: Yeah. Yeah.*

*A: Is, is almost the same.*

*T: So, I-I think, I've been, I've been fighting to live the life that I think is best for me, as well. And not in the same way, but I've-I've felt that, um...When you talk about your dreams for the future, for helping other people?*

A: Yes.

T: Um, and encouraging and empowering other people? Um...I-I-I—you probably saw me smiling, writing down what you were saying...

A: Yeah.

T: Um. I want to write a book for young people.

A: Oh, really?

T: I-I also want to do that, too. And I-I have said to people, “If one person reads my book and—

A: [murmurs] Survives...

T: “—feels less alone in the world because of it, then...then I’ve done my job.”

A: That’s project. Yeah. At least you’re giving your message, someone else use it. Yeah.

T: Yeah. Yeah. So I...and...It’s totally different, but I also, like, you know, I’m at this point in my life, feeling a bit over my head, and feeling a bit overwhelmed by how much I have to do, and...

A: Yeah, work is a lot, yeah.

T: Right. It’s totally different, totally different but...I-I’m feeling the same ways that you’re feeling.

A: Mhm.

T: Um, in a lot of ways, so—

A: Can you believe that? [laughs quietly]

T: So it’s really—it’s really cool, to—it’s-it’s beautiful to know that—

A: I’m a restless, too, and you are, I think the same way, you’re—

T: I think...

A: Restless, too.

T: Yeah.

A: I hate being at, at, rest. Hate.

T: Yeah. And, and to come from different experiences, and to live totally different lives, and yet still feel the same thing.

A: Yeah.

T: I think that’s really amazing.

A: Mhm.

T: To know that. Because...Because no matter what, no matter where our lives go?

*A: Yeah.*

*T: The two of us know, that there are other people who want to help other people.*

*A: Exactly.*

*T: You know?*

*A: Yes.*

*T: And we can both bring two very different perspectives and sets of skills and powers, you know, that we have.*

*A: Yeah. Yeah.*

*T: Um, so those are the main things I've taken from this so far.*

*A: So beautiful, yeah.*

*T: I'm...I'm...I don't think I've realized how lucky I am to have found you and this conversation.*

*A: Oh, my gosh.*

*T: I really don't. I've like been listening to it...*

*A: You gave me superpower [laughs]...*

*T: Yeah, you—you are giving me superpowers, [Asma].*

*A: Oh my gosh, thank you.*

*T: This, this is—This is pretty amazing—*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: —And I think we have, we have the opportunity...if you're willing to share your story and help other people feel...*

*A: Exactly.*

*T: ...a little less alone.*

*A: And we will, though.*

*T: And be able to say, and be able to say that, a refugee is not just...The kind of thing you see on the news.*

*A: Mhm.*

*T: It is a person who wants to help people the same way that I do.*

*A: Yeah, yeah, that they have a chance, yeah. Yeah.*

*T: Right. Another person who loves to read, who loves to watch TV, had a temporary job at a dentist's office and actually really loved it, like—that—those are things that people can connect with.*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: You had a life just like everybody else.*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: It was different, but it doesn't mean that you are any more or less human than anybody else. And I think that's really amazing.*

*A: That's really amazing, yeah.*

*T: So thank you for sharing that with me.*

*A: Oh my gosh, I learn about a lot of people, and it-it was not coming my mind, only just like...boom.*

*T: Yeah.*

*A: The more I read the story, the more I...see, my eyes, what is happening around this world? I learn about...human people need to lift each other.*

*T: Mhm.*

*A: Not to...make them down each other.*

*T: Yeah.*

*A: So when the other people's mind, their mind work opposite of my mind, I say, "What's wrong with this person?"*

*T: Yeah.*

*A: I-I don't get that, so...*

*T: Yeah.*

*A: Is very hard.*

*T: Yeah. [pause] But we try to learn anyway.*

*A: Exactly. And, I'm trying to give a chance for the other. As much I can.*

*T: You're trying to give a chance for the others, as much as you can?*

*A: Yeah. Yeah. But I wanna just...get enough, enough for me first. Then to bring them.*

*T: Yeah. That's beautiful.*

*A: Yeah.*

*T: All righty!*

*A: All right!*

This will be my last recording for this project. As it is her story, Asma will be the narrator of the last episode. So, in these final seconds, I want to thank you for listening. For opening your mind and your heart to a story that will hopefully change the way you think about the people you see on the news, in the street, and in front of you in line at the post office. If it moves you *half* as much as it has moved me, then I—*we*—will have succeeded. [recorder clicks off]